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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to enhance the perception of the early childhood professional among parents of children at an on-site child development center in a medical center. A pattern was documented of negative communication and lack of respect for the goals and policies of the child care center. The practicum's goal was to replace the parental misconception of early childhood professionals as "baby-sitters" with an increased awareness of early childhood professionals as "educators." Three expected outcomes were articulated to evaluate the practicum by means of a survey. An awareness program was developed that included activities providing information and education regarding the role, significance, and necessity of early childhood education in the lives of young children. Networking and collaborative activities provided opportunities for parents to develop positive interaction with child care professionals. A child advocacy forum was held to increase collaboration among parents and teachers; and a media campaign provided visibility and education for the parents. A parent survey measured program effectiveness and parent perception. Survey data indicated there were increased positive perceptions of early childhood education and increased interaction and mutual respect between parents and educators. The survey form is included. (Contains 26 references.) (TM)

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ED 383 466

Enhancement of Early Childhood Professional Status as a Bridge to Positive Parent Perception and Respect for Early Childhood Educators

by

Doreatha J. Fields

Cluster 60

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University

1995

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Doreatha J. Fields under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

May 4, 1995
Date of Final Approval of Report

June S. Delano
Dr. June Delano, Adviser

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ABSTRACT

Enhancement of Early Childhood Professional Status as a Bridge to Positive Parent Perception and Respect for Early Childhood Educators. Fields, Doreatha J., 1995: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Parent-Teacher Relationships/Early Childhood Administration/ Parent Participation/Early Childhood Educators/ Early Childhood Professionalism

This practicum was designed to enhance perception of the early childhood professional among parents. The goal of the practicum was that the parental misconception of early childhood educators as "baby-sitters" be replaced by a heightened awareness of early childhood professional as "educators".

The writer developed an early childhood awareness program which included activities providing information and education regarding the role, significance and necessity of early childhood education in the lives of young children. Networking and collaboration activities were designed to provide opportunities for parents to develop positive interaction. A child advocacy forum was held at the writer's workplace to increase collaboration among parents and teachers. Community-wide media coverage provided visibility and education to the public.

The writer developed and analyzed the data from a parent survey to measure program effectiveness and parent perception. Analysis of the data indicated that there was a more positive perception of early childhood education and the early childhood educator. Through the process of education, collaboration and publicity, parents and educators developed positive interactive relationships with increased mutual respect.

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March 23, 1995 (date)

Doreatha J Fields (signature)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENT		iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS		iv
Chapter		
I	INTRODUCTION	1
	Description of Community	1
	Writer's Work Setting	2
	Writer's Role	4
II	STUDY OF THE PROBLEM	5
	Problem Description	5
	Problem Documentation	6
	Causative Analysis	9
	Relationship of the Problem to the Literature	11
III	ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS	16
	Goals and Expectations	16
	Expected Outcomes	16
	Measurement of Outcomes	17
IV	SOLUTION STRATEGY	19
	Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions	19
	Description of Selected Solution	21
	Report of Action Taken	23
V	RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	35
	Results	35
	Discussion	37
	Recommendations	43
	Dissemination	44

REFERENCES 45

Appendix 47

EARLY CHILDHOOD AWARENESS PROGRAM (ECAP)
PARENT SURVEY 49

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Community

The writer is affiliated with a large (600 beds) regional medical center which was established over 50 years ago. The medical center is located in a culturally diverse southern community which features medical sciences and aerospace technology as its principle industries. The community is culturally diverse and consists of residents from all socioeconomic levels. The major component of the community is comprised of middle to upper-middle class individuals who are employed within the medical and aerospace industries.

Geographically, the community is located in a county which represents one of the largest land masses within the state. There is a constant fluctuation in the numbers and social backgrounds of the residents who have been transferred to medical, military and aerospace agencies within the community. These families develop permanent residency and the population growth continues to rise and change in constituency. Because of the location within a southern state with superb year-round climate, there is a large percentage of senior retirees. The community's multigenerational population reflect the impact of the geographical amenities of the community.

The medical center is one of the major employers within the county and currently employs over 2700 medical, clinical, and nonmedical professionals. The multiplicity of

employees bring a variety of skills, experience and expertise to both the community and the medical center. Because of its location and position of prominence within the community, the medical center has been the site of innovative, trendsetting programs and services.

Writer's Work Setting

Inherent to its zeal for innovation and trendsetting, the medical center was the location of the first corporate on-site child development center within the community. The child development center was birthed from a desire for providing the hospital employees with a family support benefit. Greater than 70% of the hospital's employees are female and this benefit was widely heralded and very desirable to the medical center's employee population.

The center was originally established in 1988 as a pilot program and is structured as a department within the human resources division of the medical center's hierarchy. Formerly, the center was housed in a modular unit which was licensed to serve 56 children. Popularity and success of the child development service resulted in the phase two expansion with the annexation of a second modular unit with an increased licensed capacity of 136. Five years after the establishment of the center, it has become the largest child development center in the county and one of the largest within the state and nation. The current licensed capacity is 423.

At the time of the report there were 2082 students enrolled. The center offers child development for children 6 weeks to 12 years of age. The center operates seven days a week from 6:00 a.m. to 11:45 p.m. on weekdays and 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on weekends.

The educational frame of the center is a curriculum-based instructional format. The physical facility consists of over 13,000 square feet and an outside recreational complex with greater than 9,000 square feet. Programmatically, the educational frame of the

center is a curriculum-based instructional format. There are three developmental clusters consisting of (a) infant development, children 6 weeks to 1 year, (b) toddler development, children 1 to 2 1/2 years old, and (c) early childhood development, children 3 to 5 years. Schoolage children, ages 6 to 12 years participate in developmental enrichment programs and a summer camp program. The center is unique in that it provides multidisciplinary education and training including student assessments and screenings, supplemental services for children with special needs, individualized parent counseling and skill development. In addition, the center offers holistic, individualized child-centered curriculum designs. Instruction is designed to lead to 100% acquisition of the developmentally-appropriate skills for each age group.

The clientele of the center is comprised exclusively of the employees, medical and hospital affiliates. The children represent broad-based multicultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The parents comprise a wide spectrum of service, clinical, medical, technological and administrative staff whose employment status range from per diem to full-time positions. The major percentage of employees who utilize the center are clinical and nursing staff. The clientele are both male and female of single parent and dual-parent households.

The faculty consists of 43 employees including teachers, early childhood supervisors, child care coordinator, vital statistics specialist, secretary, receptionist, education coordinator and director. The educational background of the staff includes state teacher certification, associate degrees, CDA credentials, bachelor degrees, and master's degrees. The minimum number of years of experience is three years and the highest number of years of experience is 24 years.

The work setting is a dynamic one with respect to cultural diversity among employees, clients and children. There is variety in the socioeconomic status and educational backgrounds. The climate of innovation, quality and program excellence permeates the organization and the child development. The child development center is

the only early childhood education component within the medical and clinical environment. It has been described as an "alien profession" in a previously medically- and clinically-dominated organization.

Writer's Role

The writer was the director of the child development center and has executed the leadership in the growth and programmatic design of the center since its birth in 1988. The writer's principle accountabilities include administration of the programmatic, personnel, regulatory, customer satisfaction, quality and financial components of the center. Programmatically, the writer was responsible for developing the mission statement, philosophy, goals and objectives of the center. The operational entities are the primary responsibility of the writer. These entities include professional development and performance, parent satisfaction, parent education, student instruction and program design.

A crucial issue related to programmatic success is the development and implementation of parent-school relations and services. Constant appraisal and communication of policies and procedures are an intricate part of the writer's role. Parallel to parent education and parent satisfaction is the development and maintenance of positive staff morale and performance as well as the delivery of sound educational practices to children. The writer's key role is the establishment of collaborative, positive relations between the school personnel and the parents while developing readiness skills in children.. The achievement of operational effectiveness hinges upon the delicate balance in the application of regulatory constraints, educational objectives, fiscal responsibility as well as child, youth and family needs.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The primary goal of the faculty of the child development center was to ensure that each child receives instruction which will assist the child in acquiring the developmentally-appropriate skills. The objective was to ensure readiness through a systematic curriculum design. Frequently parents are unable to align their personal goals with the direction and goals of the center. In light of the fact that the center was originally established as an employee benefit, parents are looking for family support services and a "place for my child while I work". By contrast, the educator's focus includes a goal of education, development and training of young children to maximize their learning and growth at each stage of their development. There was a lack of clarity regarding the role of the early childhood.

Early childhood education within the medical arena had been left to the discretionary interpretation based on individual parent expectations. Sociologically, many parents had expressed guilt and frustration regarding having to leave their children to pursue careers and establish economic stability. As an extension of their role, parents sought a nurturing counterpart. The early childhood educator is often seen as that individual. There was an inadequate perception of the early childhood education profession among parents.

The misconception and lack of clarity regarding the roles and level of professionalism was frequently manifested in episodes of negative communication. Further, there was a lack of respect for the educational decisions as well as the content and design of the center's program. Behavioral expectations were questioned. Educational goals were challenged on the basis of merit and necessity. There was a lack of consistent interest in the student daily reports of the child's performance, experiences and need for home follow-up.

Supervisory staff were frequently targeted as the objects of frustration due to their need to made decisions regarding regulatory, health and safety mandates. Administrative decisions regarding health records and medical clearance were considered insensitive and egotistical because they conflict with parental desires. Parents perceived these decisions as inconvenient for them and their families for economic reasons. Contrary to parent perceptions, the health records, medical clearance and other safety requirements, were designed for the health, safety and well-being of all children.

The frequency in episodes similar to the ones described above created a large number of documentations of negative teacher-parent interactions. Parent perception and desire for "baby-sitting services" conflicted with the educator's goal of developmental training and acquisition of readiness skills. In summary, the problem was that there was an inadequate perception of the early childhood education professional among parents.

Problem Documentation

The center utilized incident report forms to document information regarding program concerns, parent concerns, accidents and interdepartmental communications. These forms were completed by faculty members. The writer received, investigated, filed and documented the incident reports. Seventy-five incident reports within a 12-month period between January, 1993 and January, 1994 cited negative communication and lack of

respect for educational and procedural policies related the goals and objectives of the center. This summary is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1

INSTRUCTIONAL/SUPPORT SERVICES
QUARTERLY SUMMARY
JANUARY, 1993 - JANUARY,1994

Developmental Area	1st quarter (Jan. 93-Mar)	2nd quarter (April-June)	3rd quarter (July-Sep.)	4th quarter (Oct-Jan 94)	TOTAL
Infant Development	1	7	1	5	14
Toddler Development	3	4	1	7	15
Early Childhood	0	0	5	6	11
School-age	1	1	0	1	3
TOTAL	5	12	7	19	**43**

The center's employees forty-three faculty members consisted of both instructional and supervisory staff. Forty-one of the forty-three faculty members indicated having experienced at least three episodes of negative parent reactions and communications. These episodes continued throughout the program year and left teachers feelings frustrated because of the continued misconception regarding the role of the early childhood program and professionals. The summary is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

ADMINISTRATIVE PARENT INCIDENTS
QUARTERLY REPORT
JANUARY, 1993 - JANUARY, 1994

1ST QUARTER (Jan. 93-Mar)	2ND QUARTER (April - June)	3RD QUARTER (July- Sep.)	4TH QUARTER (Oct-Jan 94)	TOTAL
6	9	6	11	**32**

The center was divided into three developmental clusters. The reports were not isolated to any of the specific clusters. There were unilateral reports from each developmental cluster within the center. These reports reflected the lack of parental acceptance of and respect for the educational and programmatic performance of the teachers as noted in Table 3.

Table 3

FACULTY ATTITUDINAL POLL
Population: 43

ISSUE	Instructional	* Support	*Administrative	TOTAL
Experienced disrespectful communication from parent.	33	5	5	43
Experienced personal frustration over parental lack of respect for role as an educator.	33	5	5	43
Experienced negative parent communication.	30	5	5	40
Perceived lack of parental acceptance as "professional" vs. "baby-sitter".	33	5	5	43
Perceived lack of understanding of the teacher role as "educator".	33	5	5	43
Perceived parental low rating of the importance of early childhood developmental program.	31	5	5	41

ALL support staff and administrative staff were formerly early childhood teachers at one point during their career track before promoted.

Causative Analysis

The writer had been responsible for the investigation and systematic follow-up of each of the incident reports. Inherently, similar concerns and indicators appeared. The parents express perspectives which were generalized misconceptions. The writer analyzed five causes of the problem.

The first cause of the problem included the lack of parental awareness of the primary roles and goals of early childhood education. The continuing conflict was between the parent's desire for an extension of themselves as a substitute nurturer while they work and the teacher's desire to meet educational readiness requirements for the children. The nature and purpose for utilizing the center were dominantly that of economic necessity for parents. The fact that the center was an employer-sponsored benefit implies that the center existed as an economic support for employees. As a result, the paradigm which most frequently prevailed was the "economic necessity" mindset. An extension of this premise was that it was commonly accepted that the child care profession derived from and exists as a family convenience and service.

The second cause of the problem was the pervasive parental mindset and stigmatization of early childhood education and child development as "baby-sitting" and a family convenience. Invariably, during the follow-up sessions, the writer found that parents referred to child development in light of the employee benefit frame. The expectation was for the teacher to simply "take care of the children " while each of them pursue their career goals. The role of child development was relegated to the "nanny" and "baby-sitting" cultural mindset.

Thirdly, many of the parents were co-workers within departments, community colleagues and friends. There was the tendency to share and discuss their displeasures regarding particular incidents that they have encountered. Externally, unfavorable media

coverage of isolated incidents within the community had done much to cause questionable perceptions of the role, characteristics and qualifications of the early childhood educator. The most frequent episodes of media coverage invariably focused upon isolated negative occurrences which were generalized as indicative of the profession. Societal perception was thwarted by the continuous spotlighting of these negative incidents which clearly represent a minute percentage of the profession. Seemingly, outlanders were portrayed by the media to define and cast spotlights on a segment of the population to define the entire child development profession The perpetuation of the "day care" myths through unfavorable and inappropriate expectations further precipitated the problem.

The fourth cause of the problem was that there was a lack of recognition by some employees of the professional status of early childhood educators in comparison to other professionals within the medical center environment. The child development program of the medical center was initiated through the frame of reference which indicated that it was a "service to the parent" rather than "an educational amenity for the child". This introductory perspective fostered , for some staff, a sense of stratifying and leveling of the early childhood education and other professionals within the medical center. Greater than fifty percent of the parents were first-time parents with nursing and clinical backgrounds. Many of these parents had not been aware of the professional status of child development and were seemingly fixated upon the societal perspective that "day care workers" are not seen as "professionals".

The fifth cause of the problem was the devaluation of the significance of early childhood education in the life of a child based on the parent's economic and social goals for themselves and their families. Parents frequently stated displeasure about the cost and constraints of child care. There was inequitable comparison of the cost without regards to the significance and value of the early childhood education. Frequently, parents minimized the impact of quality child care upon the lives of children. Negative

reactions to program necessities indicated the prevalence of child development being assigned a lower priority on the list of necessary household expenditures.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The problem of inadequate perception of the early childhood professional among parents has been a concern of early childhood educators in previous years. Professional perspectives of this problem implies that there is a misconception regarding the roles, value and significance of early childhood education and the early childhood professional.. The public needs to be better educated about the child care profession (Caldwell, 1983). While many educators regard early childhood education as a bridge to kindergarten readiness as a well defined, clearly articulated construct, others recognize it as one that is extremely delicate and complex, ladened with ambiguity. In truth, early childhood education, kindergarten readiness and conventional approaches to early are continuously being scrutinized by educators (Kagan, 1992). The professionalization of the early childhood educator is a major concern of early childhood educators and has been the primary issue of the profession for many years (Radomski, 1986). Uniform approaches to achieving a consensus among educators regarding methods of obtaining this goal is of paramount necessity.

Teacher-parent relationships are defined as vastly different, consequently, the perception of competence regarding each other is based on the role difference (Power, 1985). Home-school relationships provide a platform for the discussion of early childhood educator-parent interaction. Parent-teacher perception of each other has been a determinant of home-school relationships patterns (Waller, 1932). The attempt to strengthen relationships as well as bridge the gap between the perception and awareness of the critical nature of early childhood education hinges upon the development of systematic collaborative exchange between the parents and teachers. Recent studies by

Neugebauer (1993) revealed that collaboration can begin by understanding the parent's definition of quality early childhood experiences. The study showed that the paramount concern of parents was the "attention given to children by staff".

Collaborative exchange and communication provides an opportunity for mutual respect. The attitudes among parents about child-rearing values, when discussed, is a basis for positive interaction between parents and teachers (Powell, 1978). One of the primary goals of early childhood education focuses upon the child's ability to function as a part of a social and peer group. Most educators hold the perspective that through positive group interaction, children build the skills for future readiness and literary (Britsch, 1993). Frequently, parents disagree with the amount of emphasis which should be placed on child behaviors and performance expectations (Lortie, 1975). Because of the polarity of perspective, there is frequently the absence of active exchange of ideas and opinions regarding child-rearing practices. Schickedanz (1994) states that today's children create difficult challenges for their teachers and teachers feel physically and emotionally exhausted at day's end. She speculates the child's socialization methods used by the parents are converse to group and peer interaction. Teachers, in her opinion, should be considered an important element in the effort to improve the child's self-control. Because of the polarity in perspectives, communication between parents and teachers can be hindered by the degree to which parents feel threatened regarding the interaction between the educator and their child (Naegle, 1956). By clarifying and understanding parental expectations, the early childhood educator is able to foster positive relationships between themselves and the parents.

The misconception regarding the role of early childhood education is directly parallel to the societal purpose for early childhood education (Honig, 1984). Many parents would benefit from being educated about the developmental prerequisites which lead to successful kindergarten experiences (Minucci, 1992). The focus is dominantly on the economic implications and benefits of early childhood education. In our society, the

need for family support services reflect the strongest basis for the need of childcare. The core entity for the family is economic survival. Invariably, some parents bring varying levels of anxiety, loss of confidence, guilt, loss of hope, gnawing worries about money, severe time pressures, or a generalized sense of themselves as inadequate to the early care and education programs each morning (Pizzo, 1993). The primary need of the family is rooted in the ability to maintain its existence by successfully operating through the menagerie of economic necessities. More and more families find that both parents need to work to make ends meet. As inflation continues to rise and unemployment increases, one income from work outside of the home is no longer sufficient, with the result that more mothers work outside the home (Morrison, 1984). Society has turned its focus toward the establishment of institutions without balancing its focus on the constituents of these institutions. In a society that is dominantly focusing upon economics and technology, the quality of education and the role of education in the lives of young children are seemingly decreasing (Suransky,1982). An analysis of the prioritization of children is evident in the dispersion and utilization of revenues. Young children are devalued in our culture as evident by the lack of commitment of resources to children as readily as to other priorities (Modigliani, 1988). Fiscal analysis of governmental support of programs for children reflect a rapidity of decline in systematic and sustained support of family support services and educational expenditures.

The misconception of the roles and status of early child educators are societal, professional and cultural in nature. Consistent with the devaluation of children is society's reflection of the significance of childcare in relation to its worth. Child care is the second most underpaid occupation in the United States (Modigliani, 1988). While child care programs are expanding, the status of child development workers has not risen (Hostetler & Klugman, 1982). An economic and social analysis of the role of child care and early childhood educators indicate that child care is not valued in our society as a significant occupational group (Modigliani, 1986). There is a broad-based, consistent

devaluation as evident in the social institutions. Governmental interpretation of the status of early childhood education continues to assign a low-skill level to the profession and consequently the status is relegated to low societal perception (Dictionary of Occupational Titles, 1977).

The general societal perception of the "baby-sitting" image of early childhood is perpetuated in the fact that many newspapers continue to list early childhood educators positions under classified columns called "baby-sitting" or "domestic child care" (Hostetler & Klugman, 1982). Parents are seeking affordable services. Economic implications are frequently the basis for the devaluation of the profession. Socio-economic parameters regarding affordability are the basis for inclusion in the low-pay scale.

Several decades of literature depict the problem of misconception of the role and status of the early childhood educators. Years later, early childhood professionals continue to grapple with these issues. While is it true that the American public needs a heightened awareness of the roles and level of professionalism of the early childhood educator, early childhood professionals must cultivate a uniform self-definition in order to present a single vision of how society perceives us as professionals (Caldwell, 1983). Quisenberry (1991) summarizes the challenge of the child advocates for the next decade. As a result of her research, she states that the past two decades have provided early childhood educators with new insights, information and additional questions regarding the care and education of young children. She states that "the number and scope of the issues are complex and seeming overwhelming. However, if the prediction comes to pass that 10.4 million children under the age of 6 with working mothers will need care by 1990, Child and family advocates have a responsibility to begin now to address all the issues that have an impact on early childhood education". Therefore, as child advocates, we must continue to serve as facilitators for change in the parent's perception of the significance of early childhood education in the lives of young children. It is through this

vehicle of change that children will be equipped with the skills and experiences necessary for kindergarten readiness.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

There was an inadequate perception of the early childhood education professional among parents. The goal of the practicum was that the parental misconception of early childhood educators as "baby-sitters" be replaced by a heightened awareness of the early childhood professional as "educators".

Expected Outcomes

The writer proposed three expected outcomes for the practicum. These expected outcomes provided situational enhancement within the center through a population sample of fifty self-selected parents from the developmental clusters within the center.

There had been seventy-five incident reports within a 12-month period which cited negative communication and lack of respect for educational and procedural policies related to programmatic objectives. The first expected outcome was that at least 45 of the 50 parents will show respect for the educational policies and programmatic objectives.

There was a high percentage of faculty members who have indicated having experienced at least three episodes of negative parent reactions and communication. The second expected outcome was that at least 45 of the 50 parents will exhibit positive reactions to teachers.

Unilateral reports of incident reports from each of the developmental clusters within the center reflected parental lack of acceptance and respect for the educational and programmatic performance of the teachers. The third expected outcome was that at least 45 of the 50 parents will develop a positive attitude toward teachers in each of the developmental areas.

Measurement of Outcomes

The measurement of the outcomes was accomplished through the use of a 10-item survey entitled the Early Childhood Awareness Program (ECAP) as the assessment instrument (see Appendix). The ECAP survey was administered to fifty self-selected parents who participated in the program. The parents indicated their responses in writing.

The first expected outcome regarding parents showing respect for the educational policies and programmatic objective was measured by items 1, 8, 9 and 10 of the ECAP survey (see Appendix). The level of achievement of this expected outcome was four-fold. Firstly, at least 45 of the 50 parents would select "high" or "medium" on item 1. Secondly, at least 45 of the 50 parents would select "so that my child gets an education and training" on item 8. Thirdly, at least 45 of the 50 parents would select "necessity for my child" on item 9. Fourthly, at least 45 of the 50 parents would indicate at least one education-related benefit for item 10.

The second expected outcome indicated that parents would exhibit positive reactions to teachers which was measured by item 5 of the ECAP survey (see Appendix). The

level of achievement would be that at least 45 of the 50 parents will select "advisor" or "family support" on item 5.

The third expected outcome indicated that parents would develop a positive attitude toward teachers in each developmental cluster which was measured by items 2, 3, 6, and 7 of the ECAP survey (see Appendix). The level of achievement is four-fold. Firstly, at least 45 of the 50 parents would select "very important" or "important" on item 2. Secondly, at least 45 of the 50 parents would select "profession" on item 3. Thirdly, at least 45 of the 50 parents would select "educational skills" or "developmental training as number 1 or 2 in rank on item 6. Fourthly, at least 45 of the 50 parents would select "high school" or "college" on item 7.

The author selected individual surveys to allow parents to review and choose the options which most closely reflected their opinion. In addition, parents were given an opportunity to include comments. For purposes of comparison, the author selected the survey format because it allowed an opportunity to cross-reference and compared responses of parents from each developmental cluster.

Measurements of survey responses were designed to give the author and the center's staff an opportunity to use the results to employ future workshops, family support services and to be responsive to the needs of the families. The survey was an attitudinal survey and thus allowed the parents to feel free to express their opinions without the fear of whether or not they were giving the "right" answer.

Literature reviews provided a platform for the positiveness and effectiveness of surveys. Powell (1978) and Kagan (1992) provided the confidence that, while their research was over two decades apart, the strategy of generating parent input through attitudinal surveys has proven to increase the sense of candor and reliability of the parents responses to the questions being asked without anxiety or a sense of surveys being impersonal and irrelevant.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

There was an inadequate perception of the early childhood education professional among parents. Educational writers have suggested solutions for the problems cited by the writer. The diversity of options provided implications for solutions. It was significant that parent opinions and perceptions be reviewed in order to determine the most effective means of identifying and correcting misconceptions held by parents. Attitudinal questionnaires were considered as effective and direct means of soliciting information regarding parent perceptions and feelings about the significance of early childhood education and the role of the early childhood educator (Power, 1975). Frequently, social and economic variables provide implications for parent perspectives. To substantiate this premise, the questionnaire cited the parent's level of education. The inclusion of this section to on the questionnaire helped to identify the relationship between the parent's demographic data and their perception of the role of early childhood and the results provided a basis for establishing positive communication between parents and teachers (Hostetler & Klugman, 1982). The use of this variable enabled the school faculty to engage in strategic planning programs aimed at designing policies and offer

services which supported the multiplicity and variety of needs and perceptions of all of the parents.

The effort of creating positive parent-teacher relationship began with a common focus. By creating occasions to work together, parents and teachers began to cultivate positive relations. These collaboration and awareness activity were effective and immediately began to improve, enhance and affirm the significance of positive attitudes between parents and teachers (Power, 1985). The use of the child as the common goal and focus fostered positive communication between both parents and teachers. The broad-based implementation of interactive activities enhanced the parent's perception of the role and status of the early childhood educator as it began to foster respect for the early childhood educator (Katz, 1984).

The establishment of the awareness and significance of early childhood education in the lives of young children provided a parallel opportunity to increase the parent's perception of the professional status of the early childhood educator. By providing information and distributing a program analysis based on the "characteristics of a profession" facilitated in increasing parental perception of the early childhood profession (Radomski, 1986).

The public perception of the role and professional status of the early childhood professional served as a strong impetus for increasing awareness. A well-organized media campaign was utilized to strengthen parents' awareness of the role and significance of the early childhood profession (Caldwell, 1983). The development and implementation of an information and awareness program effectively increased the parent's respect for educational policies and program objectives (Dresden & Myers, 1989). The delicate blend of facts and common interests served as a platform for positive parent-teacher interaction. Once parents and teachers began to work collaboratively, there was a strong bond for consensus toward advocating for the need of children. Collaborative child advocacy provided strategies to foster a reaffirmation of

the value of children and the significance of early childhood education (Zeece, 1988). Blank (1993) supported statewide collaboration across the United States. Committees, according to Blank, when formed, forges new relationships between child care advocates and state administrators as well as new partnerships among agencies responsible for child care and early childhood education.

Description of Selected Solutions

The possible solutions identified in the literature are varied and impacting. The anticipated outcomes were (1) parental respect for educational policies and programmatic objectives, (2) parents exhibiting positive reactions to teachers, and (c) parents developing a positive attitude toward teachers in each of the developmental areas. The successful strategies were directly achievable within the child development environment. They provided information regarding early childhood education, opportunities for parents and teachers to work together and the facilitation of positive reactions and mutual respect between parents and teachers.

Solutions directly address the five critical causes which contribute to the problem of inadequate perception of the early childhood professional within the medical center. The most dominant cause of the problem within the center was related to the lack of parental awareness of the primary role and goals of early childhood education. The strategy which was most effective in achieving this goal was the implementation of an information and awareness program to facilitate positive attitudes among parents (Dresden & Myers, 1989). The center provided information regarding the roles, goals and significance of early childhood education and development in the life of a child.

The second most critical cause, as perceived by the writer, was the pervasive parental mindset and stigmatization of early childhood education as solely a "baby-sitting" service and "family convenience" for the employees of the medical center. The writer chose to

apply the information and awareness model to assist parents in understanding the role of early childhood education in the lives of children (Radomski, 1986). The program evoked a paradigm shift through the delineation of the educational and developmental functions of the early childhood education experience in the life of a child.

Thirdly, the media perpetuation of the "day care" myth through unfavorable media coverage of negative isolated problems within the community had posed a threat to blemished the professional image of early childhood education. An enhanced perception through positive portrayal of the profession presented a positive perception for the public. A well-organized media campaign was utilized to strengthen parents' awareness of the role and significance of the early childhood profession (Caldwell, 1983) The plan included a method of comparing and contrasting the myths by embarking upon a positive media campaign citing current research and findings which support and substantiate the effects of the early childhood education experience upon the life of a child.

Fourthly, there was a lack of advocacy for professional recognition and status of the early childhood educator in comparison to the other professionals within the medical center's environment. An early childhood awareness program was an effective model for enhancing parent awareness of the quality components of early childhood education (Zeece, 1988). Feasible solutions included methods to develop and implement a redefinition and clarity campaign designed to heighten awareness of the credentials, training and skill levels of the early childhood educator.

The fifth cause was the devaluation of the significance of early childhood in the life of the child based on parental economic goals for themselves and their families. Child advocacy encouraged child-centered perspective among parents (Katz, 1984). The basis of the advocacy group was to emphasize the need for prioritizing children as a critical and significant societal resources and cultivate an awareness of the basis and significance of early childhood education as it relates to the national education goal of "readiness" for preschool children.

The implementation plan encompassed all facets of the previously stated indicators. The writer recruited fifty self-selected parents to participate in a parent-focused education and awareness program. The attitudinal survey was administered at the close of the process in order to identify parent perception of the role and significance of early childhood education (Power, 1985).

The writer launched an internal media and publicity campaign designed to enhance parental respect for the early childhood profession (Caldwell, 1983) consisting of (a) factual and informative data regarding faculty credentials and experience (Radomski, 1986), (b) comprehensive exhibits including materials related to the role and impact of early childhood education in the life of the preschool, (c) parent newsletters citing research and findings supporting the impact of early childhood education, and (d) specific illustrations of the program successes which have had a positive impact on the lives of the children within all developmental clusters.

The writer utilized the results of the attitudinal survey as a vehicle to facilitate long term positive attitudes among parents (Dresden & Myers, 1989). Frequent feedback sessions were held to discuss positive teacher-parent interaction (Zeece, 1988). In addition, the writer developed centerwide collaborative-focused activities for parents and teachers (Power, 1985). Upon completion of the early childhood awareness program, the writer assessed the impact of the education and awareness program by the use of the ECAP survey (see Appendix).

Report of Action Taken

The writer developed a four-component program which was implemented over a 12-week period. These program components were designed to address (a) organization and definition, (b) strategic planning, (c) networking and collaboration, and (d) information and education. Activities within each of the components directly address the five

perceived critical causes which contribute to the problem of inadequate perception of the early childhood professional within the medical center:

1. The most dominant cause of the problem within the center was related to the lack of parental awareness of the primary role and goals of early childhood education.
2. The second most critical cause, as perceived by the writer, was the pervasive parental mindset and stigmatization of early childhood education as *solely* a "baby-sitting" service and "family convenience" for the employees.
3. Thirdly, the media perpetuation of the "day care" myth through an unfavorable media coverage of negative, isolated incident involving a child care within the community had posed a threat to blemished the professional image of early childhood education.
4. Fourthly, there was a lack of advocacy for professional recognition and status of the early childhood educator in comparison to the other professionals within the medical center's environment.
5. The fifth cause was the devaluation of the significance of early childhood in the life of the child based on parental economic goals for themselves and their families.

The writer utilized three solution strategies to address the causes of the problem:

a. An information and awareness program,

b. A media campaign, and

c. Child Advocacy activities

Paramount to success of the program was detailed organization and planning as critical elements. The writer established a focus group consisting of teachers and parents. The focus group was given two major objectives. First, the group was to develop a theme and logo which would serve as a visual reminder of the focus of the project. Secondly, the focus group was to identify activities which would be aimed at defining and fostering a positive perception among parents regarding the role and significance of early childhood education while enhancing the understanding of the role of the early childhood teacher as a professional.

At the onset of the project, as a part of the organization component of the project, a logo was developed. The theme for the project was "Teachers and Parents Build the Bridge to the Child's Future" . The theme and the logo emphasized that collaboration and networking between the teachers and parents was critical to the child's future success. This logo and theme was duplicated and was displayed at several prominent locations within the school which included the main office, classrooms and the main entrance.

Collaboration and Networking

Hymes (1980) established the critical need for collaboration. He stated that just as we need bridges within the early childhood profession, we need more and better bridges between schools and homes. The logo and theme served to enmeshed the parents and teachers together while defining the child as the common focus.

The ECAP activities flowed through kick-off activities which took place during the second week of the project. The writer issued written invitations to all parents to attend.

This activity was used to recruit and identify at least fifty parent volunteers who would be interested in participating in the project. The writer met with parents and teachers during an informal forum to discuss issues facing children, youth and families. As a product of strategic planning, the meeting room was embellished with large poster-size prints of the logo and theme. This embellishment precipitated a sense of comradery between parents and teachers . To evoke a sense of unity and familiarity, there was a teacher present from each of the developmental classrooms within the center. This strategy fostered a clear sense of uniform expectations and eager participation. Parents and teachers discussed the need for creating and developing network and collaboration activities provide both the parents and teachers with upgrades and mentoring for the benefit of the child as the core focus. To provide a permanent platform for the project and satisfy the information and education component, the writer presented information regarding the National Education Goal 2000 related to readiness which stated that "by the year 2000, every child in America will enter school ready to learn".

The positive and enthusiastic reaction to this topic generated a dynamic platform which changed the course of the project. Parents became astutely aware that there was a need to prepare children developmentally in order for them to acquire "readiness" skills as projected by the national education goal. Questions were asked about the plans and definition of "readiness". This was the miracle topic which ignited the sense of urgency among parents.

The new awakening and feeling of urgency among the parents provided the opportunity to cast light upon the nature and design of the center's program. The writer used the opportunity to crystallize the significance of the early childhood education experience and the role of the early childhood educator in facilitating in meeting this goal. At this point the group dynamics were synergistic.

At the conclusion of the meeting the following child advocacy agenda was generated:

(a) the need to identify uniform definitions of "readiness" by the local school district,

(b) parents desired to identify resources which were available to parents of preschoolers,

(c) parents requested for information on regulations involving the before/after school programs in public schools, and

(d) the coordination of a child advocacy forum to bring school district officials into the hospital to answer parent and educators concerns about the issue of readiness.

The parents and teachers brainstormed about issues and strategies and a full agenda of questions which would be directed to the panelist.

The evolution took place that through this initial collaboration session came the impetus and format for achieving the information and awareness campaign, the media campaign and child advocacy activities. As a facilitator, the writer identified the three strategies which were to be accomplished. Attendees were asked to volunteer to become involved in one of the three ECAP (Early Childhood Awareness Program) activities including the (1) information and awareness, (2) media campaign and (3) child advocacy forum. The objectives were set and the ECAP program continued to evolve. Follow-up meetings were scheduled with task deadlines ascribed.

While there was much success in the network and collaboration aspect of the project, the writer was unable to secure the number of parents desired to complete the anticipated outcome. The strategic planning component was engaged in order to solicit parent and teacher input regarding how greater numbers of parents could be identified and recruited. The collaborative input and problem-solving task was put before the group. There was unanimous consensus that there was industry malady which countered the ability to generate high volume of parent participation in center-related meeting and

activities beyond the work day of the parents. The agreed upon solution was that each classroom would have an ECAP representative whose role would be to recruit at least six parents from their classroom. The ECAP representative was identified as the teacher from each classroom. The plan was successful and by the end of the third week there was greater than 50 self-selected parents who agreed to participant in the ECAP program.

Parent information and education

The next four-week segment of the program was designed to launch a series of parent workshops and parenting classes designed to:

(a) increase the parents' aware of research revealing the impact of early childhood education on the lives of young children.

(b) inform parents of developmental milestones of children birth through five,

(c) illustrate comparable worth studies reflecting child care professionals wages, and

(d) increase parent awareness of the training, experience and credentials of the early childhood educators within the center.

To achieve the fourth objective, the writer authorized the installation of a "early childhood educators wall of fame". All faculty and volunteers took pictures and these pictures were mounted on a wall including the number years of experience, the credentials and training of the faculty member underneath their picture. The entire 43 staff members and two volunteers were posted on the main wall at the entrance of the center. This location provided high visibility and was prominently and conspicuously displayed. The goal was to provide information at- a -glance for the public while serving to further acquaint parents and visitors of the level of professionalism of the early childhood educator as evidenced training and certification. The strategy generated extremely positive feedback from parents. Many of whom indicated that they were surprised to know that the faculty had the level of training and credentials as displayed.

A sense of appreciation and renewed perceptions was readily apparent. Faculty members expressed that many of the parents began to solicit more input from them regarding child rearing practices, developmentally- appropriate behaviors and parenting needs. Each of the teachers perceived this as a function of parents being more aware of their training and "expertise" on the subject of child care and child development.

Contrasting results were applicable to the parent workshops. The scheduled workshop was provided and there were only four parents to attend. Common to the child care industry, the parent participation percentages remained low.

The writer engaged in strategic analysis and reviewing creative resource ideas. As a result, the writer created and developed a concept coined the "Walk-by-Wall-Workshop". The concept encompassed the notion that information could be displayed in a highly visible wall of one of the main corridors. The strategy was designed to make information available in the pathway of parents picking up their children. The parents were able to read the information as they entered and departed from the school. The parents had access to the formation at all times and they read it at their leisure in a relaxed manner. The parents who wanted copies of the literature requested them at the director's office, at the center's main office or through the education coordinator. The magazine, journals and book articles were displayed linearly across the entire wall. Each article was mounted on a variety of colors of sheets of paper. One article per color. The articles ranged from 2 to 7 pages in length. New articles were placed on the wall each week. The subject matter included literature similar to the title and content of the workshops which were planned. There was a variety of articles, research and informational materials for all ages groups from infants to five years old.

Parents highly rated the innovative attempt to provide "portable training for parents on the move". The success of this strategy was the highlight of the ECAP program. Teachers found the concepts so rewarding that there was a consensus that this approach would be helpful to them as well. The concept was further expanded. The writer

implemented a "table talk" workshop concept where information was early childhood information and articles were placed on an acrylic upright frame in the faculty break area. As faculty had meals and breaks they received training and information. the content was changed within every two to three days.

Both the "walk-by-wall-workshop" and the "table talk" training concepts offered an excellent method for reaching hard to reach population and groups of parents and teachers. The information and education component was so successful that instead of offering four workshops, the concepts continued throughout the duration of the 12-week period and were positively received and highly effective.

Child Advocacy Forum

The next project objective was to develop and implement a child advocacy activity. The child advocacy activity was done as a follow-up to the initial collaboration and network session consisting of teachers and parents. The objective was achieved during the seventh through the ninth week of the ECAP program. Much of the organizing and planning had been started during the second and third week of the project as a part of the initial collaboration and networking session. The goal of this objective was to develop and implement a campaign to generate public awareness of the significance of early childhood education by highlighting the national education goal for readiness as a platform for calling attention to the role of early childhood education in achieving this national goal.

The writer mobilized the ECAP focus group to identify panelist for the forum which was held at the center. The target audience consisted of parents from the center, community child care providers - public and private, licensing agency staff, school board members, teachers, child care program directors and concerned citizens from the community.

The format of the child advocacy was open forum based on the questions that had been generated by the parents and focus group. The panelists were members of the

school district who could speak to the issues of defining readiness, coordinating resources and delineation of information and resources available to parents of preschool children. The timing of the activity was during the county election of school board members. It was thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to call attention to the early childhood education arena while establishing public awareness and generating media coverage of the child advocacy forum.

The writer worked with a clerical project assistance who coordinated contact and plans to solicit school board candidates to serve as panelists for the child advocacy forum. The date and location of the forum was confirmed. The plan to include candidates had to be abandoned because the time of the forum conflicted with district mandatory meetings and statewide conference for newly-elected school board members. The transformed plans were supported by the focus group and recommendation from one of the school board members was to include school district staff who at the core of program development and planning of early childhood programs like pre-kindergarten program, early intervention program and instructional curriculum component of the school board. The writer sought the names of recommended participants and worked with the project assistance to retain the date of the forum and include the alternate panelists as indicated.

The strategic planning was effective and the forum was held as scheduled with school board representatives from the curriculum and development, prekindergarten and early intervention programs of the school district. In addition, the panel included a representative from the district child care training agency.

Parents, community participants and teachers expressed gratitude for the experience and felt that the objectives were met. The most interesting element was that the request was made by the forum participants that more sessions be held and that public forums be planned and implemented county-wide and repeated frequently within the future to

insure continued collaboration between the school district and the early childhood parents and providers.

Media Campaign

The culmination of the ECAP was the media campaign plans. The writer worked with the hospital public relations department to identify methods and opportunities for publicizes early childhood education and its role and significance. Recommendations included contact with the education editor of the main newspaper within the community. When these recommendations were pursued, the interest was apparent. The writer arranged for a site visit by the education editor of the local newspaper to discuss the ECAP activities and initiated a plans for a series of articles focused at educating the public about early education and the national education goals projecting kindergarten readiness among preschool children by the year 2000.

During the site visit, the tour and conference served as the vehicle for informing the newspaper's education editor of the project goals and objectives. While being highly interested in the topic, the editor indicated that the subject represented a "new" perspective to education and that the concept would require a cultivated platform within the community because of the lack of awareness of and the absence of information and community collaboration on the subject or "readiness". The photographer took pictures and the editor was given a generous information packet consisting of facts, figures and information regarding the center, the child advocacy forum and articles related to the role and significance of early childhood education in the lives of young children. A commitment was made by the editor to identify a social climate and the first available opportunity to publish an article on the subject. The writer suggested that a series of articles be done over a period of time as a method of educating the general public. The suggested was well received.

Program Definition and Clarification

The final three weeks of the ECAP project were centered on the goal of educating parents about the goals, objectives and philosophy of the center. The writer organized a meeting with members of the center's parent advisory committee along with the ECAP focus group. The group met during the ninth week to outline the methods for reaffirming an understanding of the role, significance and design of the center's educational program. A secondary goal was to insure that parents received a broad perspective of the nature of the curriculum and philosophy of the center. The networking and collaboration meeting provided an opportunity to hear parents' perception on how this information could be disseminated in a creative way even though parents had received a center handbook upon registration.

The recommendations were compiled and included (a) re-issuing copies to all parents, (b) developing a "did you know that..." newsletter, and (c) special information on daily reports. The writer collected all of the material related to the center's operation and philosophy. The materials were compiled as a packet for each developmental area of the center. The packets were color-coded by developmental area and issued to all parents. In addition, the education coordinator created a series of "Did you know that..." newsletters and flyers. The content of these newsletters gave tidbits and facts about the center, faculty, the curriculum, the philosophy and mission statement of the center. The information was made available through the hospital newsletter and by posting within the center at highly visible locations.

The information and education strategies continued from week nine through twelve. Parents were inundated with information and facts about the center in order to facilitate a clearer understanding of the center's program and its goals. Feedback was generated from members of the parent advisory committee regarding the effectiveness of the approach. Feedback reflected positively regarding the parents knowledge of the program

being increased and improved. The feedback session resulted in dynamic interaction between parents of children from infant to preschool and the teachers.

ECAP Process Summary

The twelve week ECAP activity project provided key opportunities to address the causes of misconception about the early childhood education program and educators. The causes were identified as:

(1) the lack of parental awareness of the primary roles and goals of early childhood education,

(2) the pervasive mindset and stigmatization of early childhood education and child development as "baby-sitting",

(3) misconception based on unfavorable media coverage of the child care industry at large,

(4) the lack of recognition of the professional status of early childhood educators, and

(5) the devaluation of the significance of early childhood education in the life of a child.

The project implementation was designed to address this causes through the development and inclusion of activities involving parents and teachers. The framework for these activities was encompassed within the activities involving child advocacy activities, information and education strategies, and a media campaign. The overall results reflected a heightened parental awareness of the significance of early childhood education experience in the life of the child, opportunities for collaboration between parents, teachers and community child care providers and agencies, and an increase awareness of the role and professionalism of the early childhood educator. The activities were orchestrated through four components including (a) organization and definition, (b) strategic planning, (c) networking and collaboration, and (d) information and education.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

There is an inadequate perception of the early childhood education professional among parents. To foster a more positive perception among parents, the author developed an early childhood awareness program. The early childhood awareness program (ECAP) took place over a twelve-week period and was comprised of three strategies. The strategies included (a) information and education activities regarding the significance of early childhood education and the role of the early childhood educator, (b) child advocacy programs involving parents and teachers, and (c) a media campaign to increase public awareness of the early childhood education profession and its significance in the lives of children. These strategies were developed and implemented through a four-fold component including (1) organization and definition, (2) strategic planning, (3) networking and collaboration, and (4) information and education. There were three expected outcomes. These expected outcomes provided situational enhancement within the center through a population sample of fifty parents. The measurement of the out comes was accomplished through the use of a 10-item survey entitled the Early Childhood Awareness Program (ECAP) as an assessment (see Appendix). The parents submitted their responses in writing.

Outcome 1 was that at least 45 of the 50 parents will show respect for the educational policies and programmatic objectives. The level of achievement was four-fold. Firstly, at least 45 of the 50 parents will select "high" or "medium" on item 1. Secondly, at least

45 of the 50 parents will select "so that my child gets an education and training" on item 8. Thirdly, at least 45 of the 50 parents will select "necessity for by child on item 9. Fourthly, at least 45 of the 50 parents will indicate at least one education related benefit for item 10.

One hundred percent of the parents placed high significance to the child development program. Each of them selected "high" for item 1. Twenty-three of the fifty parents selected "so that I can work" while twenty-seven selected "so that my child gets education and training". There were clear implications for the reason for the use of the center. Greater than one-half of the parents responding primarily used the center for education and training and slightly less than one-half used the center as a means of economic necessity so that they could work. The parents response to this item clearly stated the needs of many parents to have the center available for work-related reasons. Twenty-eight of the fifty parents selected "necessity for my child" for item 9, while twenty-two selected "necessity for me to work". Fifty of the fifty parents indicated at least one education-related benefit for item 10. 2 of the 4 objectives of outcome 1 were met.

Outcome 2 was that parents will exhibit positive reactions to teachers as measured by item 5. The expected level of achievement was that at least 45 of the 50 parents will select "advisor" or "family support" on item 5. Five parents selected "service provider", thirty-two parents selected "advisor" and thirteen parents selected "family support" for item 5. Of particular notice was that there was a variety of perspectives from the parents with the dominant perception of the early childhood educator as "advisor". The objective of outcome 2 was met.

Outcome 3 was that parents will develop a positive attitude toward teachers in each of the developmental clusters. This expected outcome was measured by items 2, 3, 6, and 7. The level of achievement was four-fold. Firstly, that at least 45 of the 50 parents will select "very important" or "important" on item 2. Secondly, at least 45 of the 50

parents will select "professional" on item 3. Thirdly, at least 45 of the 50 parents will select "educational skills" or "developmental training" as number 1 or 2 in rank on item 6. Fourthly, at least 45 of the 50 parents will select "high school" or "college" on item 7.

Forty-eight parents indicated "very important" for item 2. Two parents indicated "important" for item 2. One hundred percent of the parents selected "very important" or "important" for item 2. Unanimously, parents rated the role of the teacher in the life of their child as either "very important" or "important". On item 3, thirty-seven parents selected "professional", eleven parents selected paraprofessional and two selected non-professional. The majority of the parents perceived the early childhood teacher as "professional". On item 6, eight parents selected "nurturing", four parents selected "physical care", twenty-two parents selected "educational skills" and sixteen parents selected "developmental training". A total of thirty-eight parents selected "educational skills" or "developmental training". On item 7, fourteen parents selected "high school" and thirty-six parents selected "college". 2 of the 4 objectives of outcome 3 were met.

Discussion

The results and implications of the findings provided unique opportunities to bridge communication and provide improved parent-center relationships. Each of the outcomes created a platform for continuous quality improvement within the program. The expected outcomes were not unilaterally met, however, the results casts a light upon the needs of the families and children of our program.

Outcome 1 was four-fold. The first objective was to receive a perspective of the parent's rating of the "importance of child development programs for children" as indicated by item 1 on the survey. The results indicated that 100 percent of the parents placed a high rating on the importance of early childhood programs. The objective was met.

The responses on the surveys gave early childhood educators the strong platform for cohesiveness and common interest because both of the parties involved related based of their shared feelings of significance for the child's sake. The result represented a milestone achievement and provided a basis for creating positive relationships between teachers and parents while fostering a renewed conception of the early childhood educator. The sense of commonality bred cooperation.

The second objective of the expected outcome 1 was to determine and understand the parental perception of the reason they utilize the center. While the author anticipated that the majority of the responses would be related to "so my child gets an education and training", the parent responses were numerically split. 23 of the 50 felt that their reason was "so that I can work". The remaining 27 responded in the anticipated manner. The overall objective was not met from the numeric perspective. The results clearly indicated that there was an economic basis for utilizing the center and that a large number of parents were primarily concerned with family support services to facilitate economic survival. 2 of the 4 criteria were met. The overall expected outcome was not met. There was, however, significant indication that the parents relied upon the center to be responsive to their need to work as a basis for economic necessity. These results, while unanticipated, reflect the social trends and needs of working mothers. The child development center and staff gained a perspective that invited sensitivity in coordinating services and programs. Parent participation and perceptions may have been directly proportionate to their ability to gain support, understand and networking to enhance their role as working parents.

The third objective of outcome 1 was to establish a perspective of the needs factor of the clients of the center. The anticipated outcome was that at least 45 of the 50 parents would place a dominant consideration of child care from the child's perspective as a "necessity for my child" rather than from the parent. The results indicated that only 28 of

the 50 parents selected "necessity for my child". While this objective was unmet, the implications of these results established parents within the center varied in their needs for the child care. The most significant issue regarding this objective is that, educators must ensure that educational programs and expectations of parents cite the needs of the parents and the child. In planning home-school activities, it was determined that educators should encompass strategies which would be beneficial to both the parents and their children. The diversity in levels of parent participation may have been directly related to the parents perspective of the necessity focus. Many parents may have responded to parent participation requests based on their perception of the impact and effect of the activity- whether it will directly impact their need or the child's. Carefully planned activities and requests for parent involvement need to be reviewed in light of the effect and relationship to the parent's needs and expectations. The results of this response seem to give explanation to the low level of participation in workshops, afterschool activities, in-school activities presented during the ECAP process. Perhaps parents who feel that child care is mainly a necessity for their child may select participation based on the primary assessment of whether or not the activity will benefit them directly.

The fourth objective of outcome 1 regarding parent statement of the benefits that parents receive form utilizing the child development center was fully met. All of the parents indicated education-related benefits their child(ren) derived from participating in the center's program. The unanimous response was supportive of the fact that parents understood and acknowledged the educational component of the school and related to the program as a benefit for their child. Even with diversity of opinions regarding the primary necessity for using the center (child or parent), all parents identified the fact that regardless of reason for using the center, the child was positively benefitted by its educational program. The results provided a sense of support and positive conception of the center and therefore resulted in less adversity and a greater understanding of the role and significance of early childhood education in the lives of the young child. The

implications of these results instilled the need for early childhood educators to continue to provide high quality educational and developmentally-appropriate programs. Parents, regardless of their level of participation and necessity perspective, seemingly supported and understood the benefits associated with quality early childhood education experiences for children.

Though only 2 of the 4 objectives of outcome 1 were met, there were positive implications for developing programs and services for children and their family. The center continued to improve its methods of delivery of services. The core implications and results induced a focus on "family" needs rather than solely the "child's" needs. This strategy improved home-school relationships while generating an evolution in the perception of the role, significance, necessity and benefits early childhood education by parents and educators as well.

The objective of outcome 2 was to facilitate in increasing the nature and amount of positive parent reactions to teachers. The measurement of the objective was determined by the parents responses to what they perceived as their relationship to their child's teacher. The options were "advisor", "family support" and "service provider". There was unilateral variance in these responses. The objective was met in that, collectively, 45 of the 50 parents selected "advisor" and "family support". The implications of these results were positive in that parents perceived their relationship with the early childhood educators from the perspective of understanding the development of the child as evidenced in their relationship as "advisor". The relationship of "family support" person substantiated the perception that both the parents and the child's needs. The results ushered in the center's understanding of the fact that the paramount focus of educational planning, program development as well as delivery of services should be child-centered and parent-centered.

The most critical component of the practicum was to directly impact the perception of the early childhood professional among parents. Outcome 3 related to directly impacting

this issue. There were four objectives cited to achieve this goal. The objectives focused on (1) parent's rating of the importance of the role of the teacher, (2) parent perception of the level of professionalism of the early childhood teacher, (3) parent expectations of their child's teacher and (4) parent perception of the level of education of the early childhood teacher.

The most significant result was reflected in the first objective. 48 of the 50 parents rated the role of the their in their child's life as "very important" or "important". Clearly, the ECAP program was successful in changing and positively impacting the perception of the early childhood teacher. It is imperative to note that a majority of the parents (thirty-seven) perceived the teachers as"professionals". While less than the anticipated number selected "professionals", by contrast, only two parents perceive the teachers as "non-professional". The remaining eleven selected "para-professional". There was a positive paradigm shift as a result of the perception of the early childhood educator among parents. The results were directly parallel to the fact that 36 of the 50 parents perceived that the teacher has a college level of education. There were major implications to this result in that parents' conception of early childhood profession. While the level of education was not the sole determinant of the quality of the early childhood educator, it was apparently a critical issue in the ability of "professionals" to relate to early childhood educators as peers. Invariably, the perception of early childhood educators was greatly enhanced with the fact that parents were made aware of their training and certification. This awareness served to validate the perception of competency among parents. The perception of competence was a critical issue in establishing a perception of professionalism.

The final objective of outcome 3 provided a wide dispersion of expectation of the early childhood educator. The delicate combination of the components of nurturing, physical care, educational skills and developmental training are vital to the success of any child development program. Parents varied in their needs and perception of the

ranking of these components. The results of the questionnaire provided strong implications that educators must recognize this variety and insure that each component exist with the child development program.

In summary, the overall ECAP process provided a significantly positive impact to the enhancement of the perception of the early childhood education profession and the early childhood professional. The administrator and educators gained critical insight into the needs of parents which underlie their responses to programs, services and teacher relationships.

The ECAP process was successful in solving the problem of inadequate perception of early childhood education among parents. The most far-reaching implication was the refocusing upon understanding, collaboration, networking and strategic planning as tools for enhancing parent conception and perspective of the early childhood educator. The center embellished its environment with signs an pictures confirming the commitment to partnerships with parents as the primary method of achieving success for the child as the core focus. Parent involvement in the center's focus groups continued with positive impact upon the center's programs and services.

The strong, positive media coverage provided the much needed community awareness of the role, significance and impact of early childhood education. The "front page" cover story in the statewide newspaper did much to call attention to the importance of early childhood education experiences for children. The effects of the ECAP program had a broad impact upon the center, the medical center and the community.

The innovative concept of the "walk-by-wall-workshop" provided a viable means of continued improvement in the delivery of information and education to parents in a positive, supportive framework. The concept was continued and provided an effective tool for parents and teachers. The center's faculty discovered and adopted the fact that family -centered educational programs enhance positive home-school relationship. The focus of parent education was altered to emphasis upon measuring success based on

effective delivery of information rather than the number in attendance at scheduled workshop. The numeric outcomes were not met, however, the effects were positive. The end provided justification of the means.

Recommendations

In replicating this practicum experience, the author recommends three critical items of considerations and implementation. These recommendations relate to the three process activities including (1) network and collaboration between parents and teachers, (2) education and training programs for parents, and (3) media coverage for the practicum project. The author focuses upon these items as methods of continues quality improvement measures.

First, strong efforts should be made to insure the inclusion of focus groups consisting of parents, teachers and program administrators. The variety of perspective will serve to expedite in establishing a greater potential for broad-based solutions to the problems involving the parents, teachers and center staff. The focus groups can be established on a rotating basis with specified targets and timelines to insure greater parent participation over a short period of time. Often parents reported their inability to spend large amounts of time in meetings over an extended period of time.

Secondly, the education and training strategies should be commensurate with the needs and identified interests of the parent population. This practicum predetermined the workshop titles in advance. A more feasible and effective solution would have been to develop workshop information based upon input from the parents. The recommended approach provides a greater response to training activities because it will meet the needs that the parents expressed, rather than the center staff's perceived needs of the parent.

Thirdly, in regards to media coverage, the author recommends media contact at the onset of the process rather than at the end of or during the process. There was a three

months delay between request for coverage and actual coverage and publication of the article. Local newspapers do not have the ability to determine the exact date of publication or acceptance of an activity. The inclusion of coverage is directly affected by social and community issues which precluded timely inclusion of coverage during the time frame of the project of the practicum. Each community has diverse interests which may impact the ability to generate coverage and interest in projects.

Dissemination

The positive impact of the practicum provided strong impetus for change within the early childhood profession from a national perspective. The author will seek to disseminate the information about the work through the following methods:

(1) local, state, and national conference presentations,

(2) requesting follow-up media coverage of the process for the benefit of early childhood programs locally and nationally. The author developed a detailed follow-up set of goals and timelines with the local newspaper,

(3) publication of the work within early childhood journals,

(4) issuing abstracts of the report to cluster members, parents and colleagues

(5) availability of the report to parents for their review and information,

(6) publication of the report through authorship of a book, and

(7) poster and paper sessions at local, state and national conferences.

Dissemination would be broad-based with a focus upon individuals and organizations who have similar concerns. The goal of the methods of dissemination would be to engage in a systematic platform designed to facilitate the author's role as a change agent. In addition, these methods of dissemination would foster opportunities to encourage positive perceptions of the role, significance and impact of early childhood educators.

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APPENDIX

EARLY CHILDHOOD AWARENESS PROGRAM (ECAP)
PARENT SURVEY

PARENT SURVEY

1. How do you rate the **importance of child development programs** for children?
   High_____ Medium_____ Low_____

2. How do you rate the **importance of the role of the teacher** in your child's life?
   Very important_____ Important_____ Not important_____

3. In which of the following categories would you put the **early childhood teacher**?
   Professional_____ Para-professional_____ Non-professional_____

4. What is the **role of the teacher** who works with your child (ren)?
   Educator_____ Baby-sitter_____ Nurturer_____

5. What do you expect from the **relationship between parents and teachers**?
   Service provider_____ Advisor_____ Family support_____

6. **Rank the following** expectations you have of your child's teacher. (1=highest; 4=lowest)
   _____ nurturing
   _____ physical care
   _____educational skills
   _____developmental training

7. What **level of education** do you think your child care staff have?
   Less than high school_____ High school_____ College_____

8. "The **main reason** I use the center is ....
   so that I can work".____ **so that my child gets education and training**".____
   OTHER_____

9. "I consider child care a...
   necessity for my child".____ **necessity for me to work**".____
   OTHER_____

10. List the **benefits you receive** from having your child enrolled in a child development center:

    _____ _____ _____